



Saving the Planet

is it a pipe-dream, or are we on the right track?

Conservation is, or should be, of grave concern to everyone. Pollution and global warming are certainly issues that have governments worldwide debating what needs addressing in order to slow the impact of human influence. Scientists are involved, researching ways to arrest CO₂ build-up in the atmosphere. Industrialists weigh better clean-air practices against maintaining profits. Staunch conservationists badger and lobby for radical change before it's too late. And the doomsday brigade claim the only way to fix the problem is to get rid of the human race entirely. Unfortunately, that won't repair the damage already inflicted specifically by us. We have been at it for too long; and we need to stay and at least try to put things right. But does anyone have the practical know-how?

It does seem fairly obvious that belching smoke into the atmosphere needs to be stopped. That would mean closing down factories and coal-fired power stations. Solid-fuel domestic heaters are also a no-no. People, however, need to cook, stay warm in winter, and have hot showers; which they can still do with the flick of a switch. The Greenies will say that's counter-productive unless a natural source of non-pollutant power is used such as solar, wind or tidal. So, how does one construct these solar panels and inverters; wind towers and turbines; and whatever generating machines are to be put in the sea? It's back to the factories again.

In truth, there is no way the human race can continue to exist on Earth without causing an upset to the balance that used to be solely Nature's province. A renowned Australian naturalist once said on TV that we are here to stay and there have to be compromises which will inevitably change the environment; and in some instances result in the eventual extinction of certain species. Despite the fact that he was right, the powers-that-were at the time didn't wish to hear the truth of it and axed the guy's weekly show. This is the kind of three-wise-monkeys attitude that is bound to prolong the drive for a cleaner planet.

The major contributors to pollution, and the governments that continue to argue the toss over what best to do about it, are in a world of their own. These are matters too great and convoluted for the average person to be anything but concerned over. As individuals, however, there are measures we can take to avoid adding to the problem. Yes, we prefer to retain our home conveniences; but do we need as many, or have to replace them so frequently; or use them wastefully? Leaving lights and appliances switched on unnecessarily wastes power. Why have an electric clothes drier when the old washing line does the same job for nothing? Using what we buy with care so that it lasts longer means less new goods need manufacturing. It all counts.

Greenhouse gases are increasing, and one of the reasons was the felling of trees in the past to clear land for farming. Trees in the main, some more so than others, absorb and retain huge amounts of CO₂, while putting oxygen into the air through photosynthesis. The deep rooted ones keep mineral salts from rising to the surface, reducing salinity in the waterways. In Australia, as is likely in other countries, many of

our rivers are so salty that the water from them is neither drinkable, nor any use for irrigation – all thanks to clearing trees. The answer is to re-plant trees; by the thousand, by the million. Farmers need to take action. Even ordinary people with small acreages can put in a few more trees; or those with just a back yard can plant one or two. It's not hard, and it may make a difference. If everyone came on board it would still take many years to overcome the problem; but it would be a start.

In decades to come, with any luck, the scientists and governments may have sorted out their responsibilities and found an answer to industrial pollution. With appropriate changes and less complacency all round, I believe our planet can be saved; and by the race that some claim was put here to destroy it.

In closing, I would suggest that our presence here was meant to be. Perhaps without the human race, Earth was heading for eventual oblivion. We were put here as caretakers to ensure that didn't happen. Admittedly, we've made a hash of the job so far; but we have realised our mistakes and are working to correct them. If we continue striving for a cleaner planet, not only will we and future generations benefit; but also other species which share it with us can, with our help, survive and make their own contributions. Together we can do it. I know we can.

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